

mands?" she had asked once. "You have said that shipping rates are low."

"What if they are?" Simon had said grimly. "Let them feel the pinch a little! The day has come for the world when labor demands its more equal share!"

Yes, she believed in Simon. At least, with sheer misery pressing close upon her, with the wails of children in her ears, sharing herself in the actual stress of the fight, how could she fail in sympathy? They were her own blood and kind. And the odds were cruelly against them. And though she was no fool, her heart had ever been stronger than her brain.

IN her brother's little house half a dozen women were gathered, haggard with famine, grim eyed with rage long held. They were the wives of the strike leaders, and their babble of fierce speech seemed to be abruptly hushed at Anna's entrance. It was as though they had held a council, of whose import she must not hear. But Anna was too full of her news to heed that stifled ominous hush.

"I have seen him and spoken with him!" she cried. "With whom?" asked Lisbeth, her brother's wife.

"With Peter Van Stel himself! He offered me money for a starving child; but I would not take it."

The other women looked at one another. In the atmosphere of the little room, heated with human bodies, there was something menacingly vague and terrible.

"What else did he say, the devil?" Lisbeth asked.

"He asked me to write to him, if I needed aid," Anna said. "He—I almost believe that he wished to be kind!"

Lisbeth checked the savage growl that rose. She had the natural ability that lifts a man or woman to leadership above the common herd. Tall and well built, her face would still have been handsome but for the hollows dug by slow starvation. She spoke now with a cunning half veiled in her bright, black eyes.

"So, it is well, perhaps. We were speaking of him but now. We wish to have speech with him, we women. Perhaps we may persuade him to reason. You shall write to him, Anna, and ask him to come to you here."

"To come here?" Anna said doubtfully.

"Yes, he will come. He fears nothing, the devil! Besides, since he has spoken with you, Anna, I think that he will trust you."

"He has no fear, I think," Anna said. "But you—what will you do?"

Just for a moment Lisbeth dropped her eyes. When she lifted them their savagery was under leath. "We shall speak to him, Sister-in-law. We shall try to persuade him to agree to our men's terms."

"It is not—a trap?" Anna asked.

Lisbeth laughed shrilly. "Why should it be a trap, girl? If he will but listen, all may be well. And you—you will have saved us all!"

Anna stood for a minute without speech. Her eyes went round the circle of lowering faces. In that moment she—she knew that more than speech with the tyrant was intended by these women. And the thought that she was to be used as a decoy was hateful to all that was noble in her nature. But—but—did this man spare others? And yet—and yet—

At the right moment Lisbeth spoke. "The children are hungry. They should be remembered," she said quietly.

Anna threw out her hands. "Yes, the children, the little children! Oh, I will do it! Give me paper. When shall I ask him to come?"

"Tomorrow evening at this hour," Lisbeth answered.

Anna bent her head to her task. Her hands were shaking. And Lisbeth, turning from her, looked round at the other women, and in her eyes was glowing, triumphant hate. That glare was answered with its like. In that hour they were human tigers, these women, maddened by sufferings, who crouched in the dim twilight of that room with gleaming eyes.

Anna raised her head. The letter was addressed and sealed. Lisbeth took it.

"I will post it," she said.

So it was done. And no time was left for doubt or hesitation. Anna went gropingly to her small, bare bedroom, and threw herself upon the bed and cried very bitterly. It had no bearing on the case, of course, but she was remembering how Peter had wept after his betrayal.

She did not sleep that night. Through the long hours she lay, without motion, and forcing back her sobbing lest she should disturb the two little nieces who shared her room. She was longing and praying that Peter Van Stel might be prudent, that he might be afraid to meet her in the house of his enemies. Should she warn him even now not to come? But that would be betraying her friends. And there were children to remember. Surely he would not come! Surely any man would view her suggestion with fear and suspicion! And yet—she did not believe that this man would fear. She believed, as I dreaded horribly, that he would come.

And he came!

HE had read her brief note with a strange, keen thrill. He also slept little through the night. He lay in the dark, and yet walked through moonlit glades and over opalescent hills with a shadow woman who had

come from lonely dreams to change his world. Her hair was like ripe wheat, and her eyes were like dark blue corn flowers, and a faint fragrance blown from rose fields tilted by fairies was in his nostrils as he walked. Always he had hid his delicate dreams from a prying world with jealous care, this man whom the world thought cold and dull and hard.

Just for one brief moment the shadow of a doubt had crossed his mind. There had been many traps. And then he laughed, remembering those frank, brave eyes. She might be cold and scornful for awhile, his shadow woman, but she would have no part in traps! And so, when the gray chill twilight was falling, he walked alone to the house of Simon Krieman.

Alone in the little living room, stripped of all that could be sold, she was awaiting him, his shadow woman. And he wondered why her eyes loomed so large and dark from a face that was white as snow, and why her hands were clenched as though she would stay their trembling. Did she fear him, was she actually afraid of him? She would fear no longer if he but dared tell her something of that which was in his heart. Perhaps some day he would dare to tell her—

"You sent for me, Madam," he said in his quiet voice with its odd note of gentleness.

He saw her moisten her lips before she could answer. "Yes," she said, "I—I sent for you."

The day was dying fast. The little room seemed to be filled with shadows. She stood among them, and her face was white and pinched and robbed of half its beauty. He caught himself wishing that he might see her in the sunshine among flowers.

"Is there anything—" he began.

And then the door that he had closed behind him was flung open, and the room was filled with women, with women who had crouched, whimpering with hate, and waited for this moment. There was hate in their wild eyes, and hate in their working mouths, and hate in their clutching hands. Not for nothing had they watched their children starve!

They crashed to the door behind them, and for a tense moment they hung waiting, poised to spring. Peter Van Stel had swung round to face them. Now he turned and flung one swift glance at the white-faced girl standing with clenched hands beyond the table. And his lips shut close. He had no fear at all. Even in that moment the girl was sure of that, and her heart thrilled at the thought.

"What do you wish with me?" Peter Van Stel asked, addressing Lisbeth Krieman.

"What do we wish?" she answered shrilly. "One thing, only one thing! You shall promise to end the strike, to give the wages that our men demand! If not—if not—"

"Yes," said Peter Van Stel quietly. "And if not?"

"We will make you promise!" she shrieked. "We have got you, Beast! You are caught and trapped! Promise, or by the God that shall judge between us we will force a promise from you!"

"I will not promise," Peter Van Stel said steadily.

Lisbeth Krieman laughed horribly. "You will not? Wait till we have tried a little torture—"

Anna sprang forward. "No, no! I will not have it! He shall not be harmed! I brought him here—"

She was between the women and the man. Just for a moment, as he heard her words, Peter Van Stel smiled. So, in spite of all, he had not misjudged his shadow woman! But that smile died swiftly. Lisbeth Krieman was beside herself.

"Stand back, you—" she shrieked. "Ah! would you shield him?"

And she struck the girl across the mouth, with a blow that drew blood and sent her faint and reeling across the room. Peter Van Stel had drawn a silver whistle from his pocket. He blew one long call, and then—the women were upon him with the rage of beasts.

HE was like a child in the grip of their mad strength.

They bore him back upon the table and held him there despite his struggles. They tore off his coat and bared his body to the waist. They had drawn the long combs from their hair, and they held them menacingly before his eyes and above his naked flesh.

"Promise, promise swiftly!" they howled. "If you value your eyes and skin, you will make haste to promise! Beast, Animal, Hog, be swift!"

He had ceased his vain struggles. Their hot breath beat down upon his face. He looked up at them with quiet eyes.

"I will not promise!" he said.

And in that moment, it would seem, love came to Anna Krieman. As she leaned there faint and dizzy against the wall, as she saw this man at the mercy of these mad fiends, love worked its miracle. For surely it was not only shame and pity that sent her leaping forward with a wailing cry, which gave her strength to tear aside the intervening women, to cast herself above this man as a shield against their tortures!

Only for a brief moment did that shield avail. They tore her away, they flung her heavily aside, they gave themselves to their work.

On her hands and knees, slowly, with painful effort, Anna reached the door. She heard one faint groan, and

it was as though her own heart was pierced. Moaning like a child, she gained the open air. It was dark, dark, and yet there were wheels of flame before her eyes. God must not let her faint—oh, not yet, not yet! She reeled, groping with her hands. She heard the patter of running feet, and called upon her flickering strength.

"Help, help! They are killing him, in Krieman's house!" she shrieked, and then, as four men dashed past, she threw out her hands and let the darkness claim her.

FOR two weeks, through fourteen endless days and nights, she was like one whose brains are drugged. She crouched upon a bed, and she did not cry. She knew certain things, since they were told her and she heard them; but they conveyed little to her. She knew that the strike had ended. She knew that the men, the better element among them sickened and horrified, had yielded to the masters' terms. She knew that there was to be no punishment for the torturing of Peter Van Stel. She knew that that had been his order from the bed where he lay, ill and broken, with the sight of one eye dimmed for life. She knew all these things; but her brain was dull and languid, and nothing seemed worth the effort and pain of thought.

Also somewhere behind the cloud that lay upon her mind was one other matter, dark and shameful, which she dared not face. For an hour she lay with twisting hands confronting that thought. And then she rose and dressed herself and went out into the streets.

It was night time, and the shops were gay with lights. Somewhere, far above in the shadowy muck, a pallid sickle of a moon was shining. And a few pale stars gleamed down and seemed to mock her shame.

She was not sure what she would do at first. For a little while it seemed to her that since she had brought his body to pain and torment, and since she loved him, it would be fitting that she should give her own body to suffering. That alone would be fitting atonement for her sin. And—it seemed to her that she had found the place, when her vague wanderings led her at last to a little, lonely, deserted jetty beyond whose rotting piles the sluggish water glistened faintly as it swayed beneath the moon.

But suddenly she felt oddly tired and weak. She must rest for just a little while before she trod her path. She had not slept for very long, and soon her head drooped wearily upon her breast, and she fell asleep. It may be that she dreamed of what might have been; for she was smiling very happily as she slept.

AND it was there that Peter Van Stel came to her, brought by the man whom he had set to watch and guard her house. He left his carriage and limped slowly along the quay until he stood beside her. And she awoke and saw him standing bare headed at her side.

Just for a moment her smile endured. Just for a moment it seemed as though her happy dreams were true. And then she remembered, and her eyes filled with horror, and she cowered away from him with a low cry.

"Indeed, indeed, I would not have you afraid," he said with utter gentleness.

"It was I who did it!" she muttered. "It was I who brought you to that room!"

"Yes," he said, "you brought me; but you did not mean that harm should come. No," he went on swiftly, as she would have protested, made confession, "I will not believe it! You were angered against me, because your heart was bleeding for the children; but you had no thought of—of what befell. Oh, believe me, I know you better than yourself!"

"You are generous," she whispered. "But you have been ill, and they say—they say that your eyes—"

And she shivered as though in pain.

"I am well once more," he said quietly. "And my eyes will serve my needs."

"I—I do not know what to say to you," she said very low. "Though you are generous, I cannot forget—"

"There is something else that I shall never forget," he said gravely. "I shall remember that you strove to save me, that you put your own body between harm and me. Until I die I shall remember that!"

She did not speak. The world seemed very silent save for the slow lapping of the waves. After a little while he said, "You thought that I needed punishment, because of the children. It may be that you were right." And he smiled with quiet humor. "You wield great power, Anna. You can punish and you can reward. See, I have known you for but a little while, yet I know that it is in your power to make me happy."

He knelt beside her where she sat, and he put his arms around her.

"I love you, Dear," he said. "Is there anything that you can say to me?"

For a moment she wavered, and he felt her whole body tremble. Then she drew a little, a very little, away from him, that she might look into his face. Her dark blue eyes were wet; but in them was a light for which—for which any lonely man might count torture a small price to pay. And she spoke slowly, making a vain effort to steady her voice.

"I think—I think that God must be a little like you!" she said.